

## Land Patterns within the Greater Yellowstone Area

The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC) identified land patterns as one of the top priorities for the federal land managers in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA). This high priority is in recognition of the rapid rate of development occurring throughout the area and the threat this poses to the ecological, scenic, and recreation values of the GYA.

### Primary Goals of GYCC Land Patterns Initiative

- To establish logical and effective ownership patterns for public and private landowners, substantially reducing long-term costs to taxpayers. Federal management can be costly due to permitting special uses like powerlines and roads, surveying boundary lines, resolving wildlife conflicts, and providing protection from natural processes like fire.
- To protect critical habitat including big game winter range, threatened and endangered species habitat, key migration corridors, and rare or unique plant communities.

### Summary of private and state owned lands within proclaimed boundaries of forests, parks, and refuges.

Unit	Federal lands	Private/ state inholdings
Bridger-Teton NF	3,400,198	39,038
Beaverhead NF– Madison RD	730,000	43,308
Custer NF- Red Lodge RD	475,000	8,000 (est)
Gallatin NF	1,806,551	344,620
Shoshone NF	2,436,850	29,707
Targhee NF	1,820,000	45,348
Caribou NF	986,969	98,993
Yellowstone NP	2,220,000	0
Grand Teton NP	310,000	3,481
JDR Parkway	24,000	0
National Elk Refuge	24,700	541
Red Rock Lakes Refuge	45,000	15,000
Total	14,279,268	628,036

Private and state lands within designated wilderness includes 548 acres in the Washakie Wilderness on the Shoshone National Forest, 1,122 acres in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness on the Custer and Gallatin National Forests, and 2,009 acres (state wildlife management area) in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.

- To protect critical open space, natural appearing landscapes, and recreation opportunities including access to public lands. Often public access is lost when private lands are developed adjacent to or within federal lands.
- To protect valuable riparian areas, wetlands, watersheds and aquatic habitat for rare or sensitive species.
- To develop partnerships with others to help protect critical habitat and open space.

Scattered within the 14 million acres of federal lands are approximately 628,036 acres of private land inholdings. A portion of the private land inholdings are already developed with residences, summer homes, resorts, and in some cases towns. These developed lands are not the focus of a land acquisition/exchange program. Key undeveloped private lands within and immediately adjacent to national parks, wildlife refuges, and national forests where there is a willing seller are the primary focus of unit land acquisition/exchange programs. Units determine acquisition priorities based on the critical resource and public values mentioned above, availability, and imminent risk of development. Tools available for this program include fee purchase, donations, land exchange, or purchase of a conservation easement to protect key property values.

Data compiled by the Greater Yellowstone Coalition points to the rapid growth around the GYA. The 20 counties surrounding the GYA grew at a rate of 14 percent between 1990 and 1999. Teton County, Idaho, experienced the fastest growth rate of 66 percent; followed by Teton County, Wyoming, 30 percent; Stillwater County, Montana, 27 percent; and Gallatin County, Montana, 26 percent. If this region were a state, it would be one of the fastest growing states in the nation. In addition to the ecological and social impacts of development, the value of land is escalating rapidly resulting in higher future costs to protect key components of this ecosystem.

Development can fragment key habitat, disrupt migration corridors, and lead to increased risk of mortality of threatened and endangered species. For example, data from the Yellowstone Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team reveals that grizzly bear mortality associated with property damage, food conditioning, and aggression occur at a disproportionately higher rate on private land than on federal lands. While private lands comprise 2 percent of the land within the grizzly bear recovery zone and 29 percent of the lands within the adjoining 10-mile-perimeter area, nearly



half of the mortality related to food conditioning, property damage, and aggression from 1985 to 1998 occurred on private land (13 on private land; 14 on public land).

New subdivisions can result in the loss of important wildlife habitat and disrupt travel corridors for moose, elk, bison, and grizzly bears. Development could occur within designated wilderness, near critical wetlands and riparian habitats, within the open space that provides the world-renowned views in the Jackson Hole area, and in key habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife and fish. Improving land patterns can help resolve long-standing issues with free-ranging bison, protection of geothermal resources, and critical wildlife winter range. In addition to protecting key

ecological values, acquisition of inholdings may reduce long-term federal management costs associated with land surveys, permit processing, road maintenance, and increased fire protection costs.

## Recent Accomplishments

***Gallatin National Forest, Royal Teton Ranch.*** In partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Department of the Interior, the Forest Service recently protected 7,772 acres of critical habitat for elk, bison, grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, antelope, and mule deer north of Yellowstone National Park.

***Gallatin National Forest, Big Sky Lumber Acquisition.*** In partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Forest Service acquired critical habitat in the Taylors Fork of the Gallatin River. Valuable grizzly bear habitat, an important elk migration corridor, and one of the highest density moose wintering areas in the Greater Yellowstone Area were acquired.

---

*Above: Taylors Fork of the Gallatin River and Royal Teton lands.*